

PAUL'S PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS TO THE CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

Ladu Ndahi Bello

ABSTRACT

The role and importance of women in the family and society cannot be underestimated. In the creation story, God created Adam first and then Eve to be a helpmate for Adam. This indicates that women's place is crucial in God's agenda. From ancient times to the present, there have been traditions and cultures that do not value women. Women are often not recognized or valued in high positions or certain social functions because of religious and cultural beliefs. What should be the role of women in social, economic, and religious functions? What does the New Testament say about women, their roles, and functions in social and religious gatherings? The focus of this work is to investigate the documentation of Paul the Apostle concerning women and its implications for contemporary scholarship. This study also examines what scholars have discussed in the Old Testament and secular fields to provide a balanced view through historical and analytical approaches, enhancing the understanding of Paul's perspective on women. It is observed that women have great potential and have significantly contributed to the growth of society and nations in both the past and present. Therefore, there should be no discrimination against women; they should be given opportunities to serve and hold important positions, enabling them to contribute and uplift humanity.

KEYWORDS: Apostle Paul, New Testament, Women, and Contemporary Scholarship

INTRODUCTION

The perspectives people have of women vary from one background to another, from one culture to another, and depending on one's upbringing. Some opinions stem from a belief that women have the same rights and opportunities as men, while the African context often places more honour on men than on women. There are also certain positions considered to be occupied only by men and not by women. In some cases, women are perceived as more useful in the home than anywhere else. These

diverse perspectives or worldviews about women are prevalent today. Throughout the Bible, women have played significant roles in the progress and development of their communities and the nation at large.

In the New Testament, Paul mentions women in his writings. He addresses various issues regarding the role of women in the home, in public spaces, and during worship. Paul's writings provide greater insight into the biblical perspective on women's roles in various aspects of life. Several passages discuss women in the New Testament, including 1 Corinthians 11:3-16, 1 Corinthians 14:33-40, and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 (<https://www.christian-thinktank.com/fem09.html>).

The focus of this paper is to examine Paul's discourse on women in the New Testament. A historical and analytical approach would be employed to carry out this work. A historical approach will be used because some examples from the Old Testament and New Testament will be discussed. Most women are more hardworking than some men. In other cases, the women have something to offer more than the men. Some women are the breadwinners of their homes. In other words, they contribute to the progress and development of the home in every aspect. Women are also gifted by nature to do many productive things at the same time. There should not be any form of discrimination against woman in assuming relevant positions, which are not outside their limit or jurisdiction.

Terkura and Asen explain that there is a risk of an association of women who are fighting for the rights of women because they have been deprived of their rights and privileges to some extent in society because of cultural and religious beliefs (147). In the Bible, the word 'man' is used at times to mean the gender that is man and woman. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not given to men only but to everyone, both men and women, according to the desire of the Holy Spirit. Women played a vital role in the life and ministry of Jesus. This means that God can use either a man or a woman to achieve his divine purpose, except that there are some offices and positions which are strictly meant for men to occupy. This work discusses Paul's discourse on women covering their heads, Paul's discourse on women and submission, and Paul's discourse on women in ministry, and biblical and contemporary examples of women with remarkable exploits.

PAUL'S DISCOURSE ON WOMEN COVERING THEIR HEADS

1 Corinthians 11:2-16, speaks of the constant practice of women in terms of uncovering their heads in fellowship times. Either a face veil or a shawl was adopted for this purpose; there were other situations in which people cover their faces or heads, such as when they lose a loved one or when they go through an awful

situation and are mourning. The act of covering the hair was not common to the Greek women but was a big deal to the Roman world, Asia, Palestine, and the East of Greece. The covering of the hair was very important to the Corinthians, probably because of their geographical position that attracted travellers from the East. None of the Gentile women, who were not staying in Palestine, covered their hair. The covering of the hair was a very strong and significant practice, even though it was a matter that had to do with culture (Hawthorne, Martins, and Reid 584).

In primitive times, men were easily attracted to women who made the covering of hair a big issue. Women who did not cover their heads were seen to be dishonouring their husbands. Members of the community take them to be wayward women who, peradventure, may be looking for relationships with other men. It is their custom that those who are looking for a relationship with men, such as unmarried or wayward women, should not cover their heads. Those who are married who cover their heads see the women who do not cover their heads as rivals. This is the tradition of those dominants in the primitive Mediterranean dispensation culture, which is common in some African cultures too. The unmarried women who were free to open their heads highly respected the married women in the church, as they constituted the major families that allowed the fellowship to be held in their houses. It was also common at that time that those who wore their hair in different styles were wealthy women, while the women who were of low income saw it as unethical or ungodly. This was the major issue that confused the Corinthians church (Hawthorne, Martins, and Reid 585).

The reason why Paul must have mentioned this issue is probably because he wanted the church to be united on the issue of the covering. Paul, from the family perspective, explains that since the man is the head (signifying authority or boss) of the woman, it is wrong for her to uncover her head. To buttress the importance, he illustrated that the woman should cut her hair completely, which is a symbol of shame and the loss of her glory, instead of uncovering her head. From the perspective of the creation order, in 1 Corinthians 11:7-12, he posits that God created Adam first and then created Eve from Adam's rib, showing that she is the glory of man. The women are also encouraged to cover their hair because of the angels. The angels in this sense could either be the lustful angels as interpreted by the Jews in Genesis 6:2, 1 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, 1 Peter 3:19-22, or angels who attend fellowship meetings as revealed in a Quran text, or angels who oversee the nations that would be ruled by the saints. Paul also speaks from a natural perspective to point out that the hair of women naturally becomes longer than men's (Hawthorne, Martins, and Reid 585-6).

Paul's comment on covering the hair during his time is also an issue in our contemporary church. There are some churches with probably orthodox backgrounds and some Pentecostals who believe strongly in the covering of hair in fellowship gatherings. They regard it as a sin for any girl, lady, or woman to pray in the church without covering their head. Some have this as a rule of worship that all females are to cover their heads in fellowship gatherings; on the other hand, some contemporary believers and denominations believe that the issue of covering the hair is a cultural issue, and it does not apply to everyone. They open their hair in religious gatherings and prayer meetings. Some others believe that it also has to do with some geographical location, that in a cold environment, everyone would wear something to avoid the cold entering their body.

PAUL'S DISCOURSE ON WIFE AND SUBMISSION

Oladoye, Adeola, and Nesta extract that Nigeria has an enormous population, and about half of the population is women. Women are relevant in all sectors of the country, but certain factors, such as religious, traditional, and cultural, have restricted their impact. As a result of these factors, women are abused, exploited, manipulated, denied certain privileges, seen as weaker vessels, and at times less important (102). From the teachings of Paul, the exercise of authority over men in teaching is unacceptable to men (108).

Segun declares that the personality of women in the community has been elevated since the introduction of Western Christianity. He indicates that because of the relationship of the husband and wife with Christ, they have equal standing. Oyeleye notes that before the advancement of the developed nation, women in Africa were seen as important assets for working on the farm, performing house chores, and producing children. When mentioning the advancement and development that have occurred in the different segments within and outside the nation, women have played a major part (93-4).

The Romans believed that a man had complete authority over all members of his family. The woman who shows submission to her husband is viewed with great respect and honoured among the people. In the Greek community, the age ratio of men marrying girls is within their thirties and their mid-teenage age, and this is because they had few women. The practice of counselling and instructing a male (also known as household code) on how to rule his family was common during the period of ancient philosophers such as Aristotle. According to them, the components of the family that the male has authority over are the wives, children, and slaves. This is in line with African culture, especially among the Bura people in Northern

Nigeria; before a young man and woman get married, a series of counselling and advice is given to them; a father to a son and a mother to a daughter respectively. Paul, in his letter in Ephesians, gives some codes of conduct on how to relate properly in the family. The passage shows how a good relationship can exist between the slave and master, father and children, and husbands and wives. Paul gives a godly perspective of submission following the good example of Christ and encourages the husband should be humble and submissive, even as the children, wives, and slaves are to be submissive. He admonishes the masters to reciprocate the submission given to them by their servants. The submission given by the children, wives, slaves, husbands, and masters is as unto the Lord. They are to submit not according to their cultural norms but according to the word of God (Hawthorne, Martins, and Reid 588).

Paul, in his prison epistles, wrote to the wives to be submissive to their husbands. He not only wrote about the wives but also wrote about fathers, children, masters, and servants. This shows that the idea of submission was not restricted to women only, but it was a practice for all believers. However, as the woman is expected to honour, respect, and be submissive to her husband, the husband, in return, is to love his wife as Christ loved the church.

PAUL'S DISCOURSE ON WOMEN IN MINISTRY

Azomo writes to show the roles women have played in peacebuilding. He asserts that although women are not given universal recognition in delicate positions, they have done well in situations where men have failed (295). Legendary documentation in the primitive Jewish congregation states that some women served in important positions in the synagogue in those days. In the concluding parts of Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul commended the effort of a worker with an administrative position in the primordial church, namely Phoebe, who served at Cenchreae, within the port area of Corinth. There are other women in that concluding passage credited by Paul for their outstanding contributions to the growth of the Christian faith. Priscilla mentioned along with her husband Aquila, Luke declared in Acts 18:26 that she was a preacher of the Gospel with her husband. Paul also appreciated the efforts of some women in his ministry at Macedonia in Philippians 4:2-3, where women were commonly given religious roles to perform (Hawthorne, Martins, and Reid 588). In 2 Timothy 2:8-15, the high-class women took pleasure in painting their hair and doing heavy and expensive hairstyles, which served as a treat and worldliness to the women of low-income status. Paul encouraged the women to be moderate and decent in their physical looks and warned

them not to carry out their church responsibility (i.e., teaching) in such a way as not to take authority (Hawthorne, Martins, and Reid 590).

Oladoye, Adeola, and Nesta extract that Nigeria has an enormous population, and about half of the population is women. Women are relevant in all sectors of the country, but certain factors, such as religious, traditional, and cultural, have restricted their impact. As a result of these factors, women are abused, exploited, manipulated, denied certain privileges, seen as weaker vessels, and at times less important (102). This is common in almost all cultural settings in Nigeria. From the teachings of Paul, the exercise of authority over men in teaching is unacceptable to men (108).

BIBLICAL AND CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES OF WOMEN WITH REMARKABLE EXPLOITS

It can be deduced from the article of Adaobi that some women have positive attitudes by proffering solutions to problems within their capacity, which brings growth to their environment and community (195). Damap comments on the response of the widow to Elijah show that God can use women in diverse ways to fulfill his divine plan and purpose (30). Makpu and Azomo citing examples of Deborah as a good example of a woman who served as a leader and brought a lot of development to her people and nation. According to them, Deborah brought several developments, such as economic, social, religious, and political development in Israel (26-29).

Oladoye, Adeola, and Nesta state the kind of relationship Jesus had with women during his ministry on earth.

Jesus spoke to the women he addressed in a thoughtful, caring manner. He addressed the woman with the bleeding disorder as a daughter (Matthew 9:22, Mark 5:23, Luke 8: 48) and referred to the bent woman as the daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:16). Jesus called the Jewish woman the daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:16) (111).

Mbolu states nameless (uncommon) women in the Bible and their roles in peacebuilding in the Bible. Altogether, 106 uncommon women contribute in one way or another to the development of peacebuilding, 86 and 26 women in the Old Testament and New Testament respectively. Examples are the midwives and nurses (Exodus 1:19, 2:7), the woman named Obed (Ruth 4:14-17), the Israelite slave who persuaded Naaman (2 Kings 5:2-4), the prostitute who pleaded for the life of her child from King Solomon (1 King 3:16-18), Queen of Sheba whose visit was to maintain a good relationship with King Solomon (1 King 10:1-13, 2 Chronicles 9:1-12), The daughter of Pharaoh who pitied an unknown child (Exodus 2:5-10), The

woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14: 1-20), A wise woman of Abel Beth Maakah (2 Samuel 20:19) (6).

Segun gives examples of women who have done well in politics within and outside Nigeria. Amina J. Mohammed (Deputy Secretary General of the United Nation), Ngozi Okonjo Iweala (Economist, first female finance minister, and Head of World Trade Organization), Dora Akunyili (Former Minister of information and Communication and former Director General of NAFDAC), Kemi Adeosun (Served as minister of finance between November 2015-2018) and Ben Lar (Member of Nigeria's House of Representatives and Women's Advocate) etc. Examples of some women who are scientists are Deborah Ajakaiya (Geophysicist), Ayoka Olufunmilayo Adebambo (Animal Scientist), Folasade Ogunsola (Medical Scientist), Lucy Jumeyi Ogbadu (Microbiologist), and Prof. Syiri Uzochukwu (Food scientist), etc (96-97).

Women have ministerial duties to perform, such as guidance, tutoring, welfare services to people within and beyond their environment, and instructing people in the ways of the Lord. What women who are called into the ministerial circle have learned and discovered over the years will benefit those who they are bringing up in the faith and the body of Christ this has been affirmed by Jonathan Rourke that women can be generous leaders, instructors that minister life to the people, consistent preacher of the gospel, industrious and good examples.

Paul's major discourses in his epistles about women are the covering of the hair, submission to the husband, and performance in ministry. None of these discourses projects the women negatively but suggests what is obtainable for women biblically, according to their context and culture at that time. Paul's assertion or declaration regarding women during his days is still relevant in one way or the other in the present day, depending on the situation. Women are advised to follow the rules of their denomination regarding the covering of the hair because this is pleasing to God when we obey authorities. A woman who is submissive to her husband is walking in obedience to God's instruction and that woman is bound to love and respect her wife which is natural because the word submission in the eyes of a woman would solve a lot of problems in the home, and they will have a peaceful and successful home. Whether in a religious gathering or any gathering, women who have good character and are qualified can occupy leadership positions that are available to them within their custom. However, women holding one relevant position or the other in a religious, social, economic, etc. setting should work with all humility, commitment, honesty, and respect for everyone, i.e., both superior and subordinate colleagues and members of the society. This will remove any negative impression people have about women holding delegate positions.

CONCLUSION

This paper has investigated Paul's perspective of women in the New Testament and its implications for contemporary scholarship. Paul is one of the Apostles who commented on some issues that pertain to women. This paper discussed Paul's comment on covering the hair, women's submission to their husbands, and involvement in ministry. While the response of Paul regarding issues related to women is controversial, this is because those who support women's ministry and those who oppose women's ministry take their proof from the writings of Paul. The reason for this perspective is that Paul addressed issues that pertain to women in different contexts depending on his geographical location and the cultural practices of the people. It can be concluded by suggesting that women should be allowed to use their gift and grace to increase the kingdom because whether male or female, Jews or Greeks, we are one before Christ. Many denominations support the covering of the hair, while some do not take it seriously. Women who submit to their husbands should obey the instructions of God and be blessed with a successful home. Women should therefore be allowed to use their gifts and talents for the progress of God's work here on earth, as we are all accountable to God on how well our gifts have been used here on earth.

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